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## **Factors Considered in the Production of Advertising In Multi-Racial Society**

### **Introduction**

Malaysia is a nation of diversity in unity where Malays, Chinese, Indians and the indigenous people of Sabah and Sarawak live in caring cultural harmony, making Malaysia the prime example of a multi-racial society in the world. This multi-racial society has prevailed for over 150 years. Its population as of 1998 was estimated at 22.2 million people. Translated into advertising demographics there are almost 4.0 million household throughout Malaysia and the average household is estimated to be 5.55 persons or 3.55 adults aged fifteen years and older. Malaysians are currently enjoying a high living standard with an average per capita income of about RM11,817.00. Its literacy rate is at par to that of developed countries with about 85% of literate adult population (The Economic Report 1998/99).

Advertising in Malaysia today has come a long way. It has been over 190 years since the first advertisement appeared in the country's first newspaper in 1805 (Mohd Adnan, 1994). Growing in tandem with the country's technology and economic development, advertisements in both the electronic and print media have evolved from simple black and white advertisements to color and even scented advertisements in the print media.

To date, Malaysia has some 2,000 advertising agencies ranging from medium-sized service agencies responsible for more modest accounts to large and often international full service agencies (Kang, 1996). Among the ten major players in the Malaysian advertising scene today are Bates Malaysia,

McCann-Erickson, Naga DDB, Dentsu Young & Rubicam, Ogilvy & Mather, Leo Burnett Advertising, Grey Advertising, Peter Beaumont, Ammirati Puri Lintas, and J. Walter Thompson with their annual billings ranging between RM 86.5 million to RM161.8 million (Source: Association of Accredited Advertising Agents, 1998).

Even though Malaysian advertising as in many other countries has its roots from the West, the concept and huge advertising markets which are generally homogenous there do not prevail in Malaysia. This is because the Malaysian's market is uniquely multiracial, multicultural and multilingual. In order to protect the local advertising industry, which is still growing, the government has issued a Made-in-Malaysia (MIM) ruling, where advertisements appearing in Malaysian media have to be produced locally. Besides that there is also a ruling that restricts Pan-Asian talent appearing in television commercials as this does not portray the true Malaysian society which mainly comprises of Chinese, Indian and Malay. In addition, the local advertising code only allows 20% of foreign footages. This allowance is to allow sequences that cannot be found locally such as snow or cyclones (Singh, 1998). This directive has caused advertisements that are already available from other countries to be shot again or duplicated to incorporate the 'Malaysian' feel (Kang, 1996).

As Malaysia progresses, advertising begin to gain popularity as the result of keen competition among the product manufacturers vying for the consumers' attention. This development if left unattended by the related authorities, is bound to get out of control. Major players involved have their sight set on one thing only, that is profit. Advertising agencies will work hard at creating advertisements that will sell their clients' products and services if unfounded claims have to be made. Thus, in view of this, certain considerations will have to be taken when producing advertisements. Thus is more vital being the fact that Malaysia is a multi-racial country, upholding eastern moral values with Islam as the official religion. It definitely requires its advertising industry to abide by the advertising guidelines that have been drawn up by the government and other related agencies. As such, the objective of this paper is to share our findings on the research that aimed at identifying the factors advertising agencies consider when planning, proposing, and executing an



advertisement for its client. Besides this, the study also asked the opinion of the respondents concerning language use and the incorporation of second message in the advertisements.

With regards to advertising ethics, Butkys and Herpel (1992) notes that the general idea of what is acceptable, as well as what cannot be tolerated are ethical standard and social values applicable to business behavior as well as to all other aspects of life. This view was supported by Mohammed Rahmat (1990), in his speech, reiterated that business is expected to adhere to these notions of right and wrong conduct as it makes decisions and pursues its goal. If it does not do so, the company and its managers will be in trouble sooner or later. On the other hand, any company which matches its own actions to society ethical standards; it will be richly rewarded by public acceptance and approval.

It is necessary for the advertising companies to operate within the governmental guidelines and/or adhere to the self-regulated mechanism. In Malaysia, the advertising control system is conducted through the Malaysian Code of Advertising Practice (1990) that was drawn by organizations representing advertisers, advertising agencies and media. It is administered by the Advertising Standards Authority Malaysia whose members, all experienced in advertising, is drawn from Malaysian Newspapers' Publishers Association of Accredited Advertising Agents Malaysia and Malaysian Advertisers Association.

### **Methodology**

Basically, this study utilized the survey method for data collection. A self-administered questionnaire was used. Respondents were selected using the non probability technique that is purposive because the study needs to have respondents who played major roles in the planning, proposing and executing of an advertisement. Thus, people from the creative and the servicing departments were selected for the study. For the purpose of this study 30 advertising industry representatives from the 1997 Top Ten Malaysian Advertising Agencies were selected. All these agencies are from within Klang Valley region. Three respondents from each agency were taken and priority was given to those who had been involved in the advertising industry for at least two years.

The ten agencies had been intentionally selected to eliminate time-consuming checks on whether they were actively involved in above the line advertising. Even though they are foreign-based agencies almost all the staffs are local people. Moreover, the current economic slowdown had caused expatriates services to be terminated leaving almost 99.9% local workers.

A three-page questionnaire consisting four sections was designed. The first section asks for the respondents' background. The second section solicits the factors that respondents consider when proposing, planning and executing advertisement. Respondents were required to indicate the factors they took into consideration from a given list. The third section was formulated to gain insight of the respondents' view concerning multilingual society in Malaysia and the fourth section seeks to determine the seriousness of the respondents in incorporating second messages in advertisements in response to the call of the government. Data for section three and four were gathered using a five point Likert scale. After pre-testing, the actual study was conducted and data collection took about one month to be completed. Then, the data were analyzed using SPSS window program. Mostly descriptive statistical procedures such as percentages and frequencies were to summarize the data.

### **Findings**

The 30 respondents of the study made up of 17 males and 13 females. About half of them (14 persons) are below the age of 30 years old, followed by 11 persons aged between 31 – 35 years old. Most of them (21 persons) had a bachelor degree, even though 16 persons had no formal training in advertising. With regards to working experience, 13 persons had worked between 5 – 9 years, 9 persons had worked for more than 10 years and 8 persons had less than 4 years of working experience.

With regards to the factors advertising practitioners considered when planning/proposing/executing advertisements for the clients, the most commonly considered factors were the concept, budget and quality of the ads as 93.3% of the respondents had chosen it as the major element they considered. The second most considered element was

accuracy of ad claim, chosen by 76.7% of the respondents. Then, 56.7% of the respondents choose element, not misleading the audience as the third element. The respondents also did consider the sensibility of the ads, as 56.7% of them had indicated. Another common element that was considered was to avoid having sexist and racist impressions in ads and 53.3% of the respondents had chosen it as the fifth element commonly considered in ad production as shown in Table 1. The above findings could help to put the mind of the Malaysian public at ease as the local advertising practitioners are responsible and sensible group of professionals. Even though we do not have a specific set of advertising act in the country, the self-regulation mechanism was capable in preventing the public from being taken for a ride by the advertisers.

Factors	Frequency (n=30)	Percentage
The concept, budget and quality of the ads	28	93.3
Accuracy of ad claim	23	76.7
Not misleading the audience	17	56.7
Must be sensible	17	56.7
Avoid having sexist and racist impressions	16	53.3
Proper usage of language	15	50.0
Not violating the different community Standard for taste	11	36.7
Not offending other advertisers to avoid legal tussle	5	16.7
Helps to promote local industries and services	3	10.0
Projects the Malaysian culture and identity	1	3.3
Not to project and promote an excessively aspirational lifestyles	1	3.3
Others	9	30.0

TABLE 1.  
Factors  
Considered by  
Advertising  
Practitioners  
when  
Producing  
Advertisements  
for Clients.



As Malaysia is a multiracial country, the study asked about the use of language in advertisements. Table 2 shows the results of questions related to this concern. When asked if the multi-racial society in Malaysia had made advertising more interesting, 93.3% of the respondents agreed that it had. The high percentage of agreement indicated that the multi-racial society had provided a more challenging ground for the advertising practitioners to explore and try different concepts in order to cater for the different target audience.

The second element that received high level of agreement was ads produced using the languages and talents of the targeted audience were more effective and worth the money spent. For this, 90.0% of the respondents agreed. The other element that had received high level of agreement with 76.7% of respondents agreeing to it was dubbing the same ad into different languages was not as effective as producing different ads for the different communities in Malaysia.

However, 70.0% of the respondents agreed that by producing one ad in different languages and using different sets of talents could cause the production cost to be high. The high production cost was not a problem. This was proven by the earlier statement that producing ads in different languages and using different sets of talents were more effective and was worth the money spent. The above findings diminished the possibility of having ads in one language i.e. Malay language. In another finding, 43.3% of the respondents disagreed that due the multi-racial society, ad production in Malaysia was time consuming if compared to ad production in a homogenous society while 30.0% of them agreed with the statement. However, 26.7% of the respondents were not sure of it.

As for the usage of non-verbal means of communication, 56.7% of the respondents disagreed that the usage of non-verbal communication in an ad was not as effective as using verbal communication. In contrast, only 26.6% of them agreed on its effectiveness. However, majority of the respondents, 70.0% disagreed that in order to overcome language barriers in a multi-racial society we should use more non-verbal communication in ads. This showed that non-verbal communication was effective in conveying messages but not as effective as verbal communication in conveying commercial messages in ads.

From the table we could also see that 90.0% of the respondents disagreed that an ad should reflect the characteristics of the nation and not the audience while only 10.0% of them felt vice versa.

Opinions	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree
The multi-racial society in Malaysia has made advertising more interesting.	28(93.3)	2(6.7)	
Ads produced using the languages and using talents of the targeted audience are more effective and worth the money spent.	27(90.0)	2(6.7)	1(3.3)
To dub the same ad into different languages is not as effective as producing different ad for the different communities in M'sia.	23(76.7)	4(13.3)	3(10.0)
Producing one ad in different languages and using different sets of talent caused the production cost to be high	21(70.0)	3(10.0)	6(20.0)
Due to the multi-racial society, ad production in M'sia is time consuming compares to ad production in a homogenous society.	9(30.0)	8(26.7)	13(43.3)
Using non-verbal communication in an ad is not as effective as using verbal communication.	8(26.6)	5(16.7)	17(56.7)
To overcome language barriers in a multi-racial society, we should use more non-verbal communication in advertising.	5(16.7)	4(13.3)	21(70.0)
Advertising should reflect the characteristics of the nation not the audience.	3(10.0)		27(90.0)
Ads in Malaysia should be in one common language i.e. the national language.	1(3.3)	29(96.7)	

TABLE 2.  
Respondents'  
Opinions  
Concerning  
Language

The earlier findings on the usage of different languages for different target audience was more effective than using one common language was further back-up by 96.7% of respondents. They disagreed that ads in Malaysia should be in one common national language and a negligible percentage, i.e. 3.3% of the respondents agreed with the idea.

To the statements concerning second message, the study found that majority of the respondents (90.1%) agreed that poorly planned/executed second messages could be detrimental to an advertising. The second opinion that received high level of agreement was that incorporating second messages in ads was an additional burden to the advertising practitioners as 63.4% of the respondents agreed with the statement as shown in Table 3.

As for the statement that second messages are aimed at bringing about disciplines, healthy living or caring society, 46.7% of the respondents had indicated that it was only sometimes true with only 36.6% of them felt that it was true. When asked if second messages were usually in line with the government's aspirations and policies, 43.4% of the respondent felt that it was sometimes true while 30.0% of them admitted that it was true. For the statement that was meant to check if the incorporation of second messages in ads are effective in educating the public, 56.7% of the respondents felt that it was only sometimes true while only 20% of the respondents agreed with the statement.

As for the statement to check whether serious thoughts were given to the types of second messages in ads, 40.0% of the respondents had indicated that this was rarely true while 36.7% of them had indicated that this was only sometimes true. Table 3 also indicates that 46.7% of the respondents felt that it was only sometimes true that besides conveying commercial messages to the target audience ads did carry second messages in response to the government's call meant to inculcate positive social values. It also showed that 30.0% of them felt that the statement was rarely true while 16.6% agreed with it.

In the final question, majority of the respondents, 60.0%, felt that it was rarely true that advertising practitioners felt that it was their social responsibility to incorporate second messages in ads. The table also indicated that 30.0% of the respondents felt that the statement was only sometimes true



and 6.7% of them had indicated that they never felt that it was their responsibility to incorporate second messages in ads.

Opinions	True	Sometimes True	Rarely True	Never
Poorly planned/executed second messages could be detrimental to an advertising campaign.	27(90.1)	1(3.3)	1(3.3)	1(3.3)
Incorporating second messages in ads is an additional burden to the advertising practitioners.	19(63.4)	7(23.3)	3(10.0)	1(3.3)
Second messages are aimed at bringing about disciplines, healthy living or caring society.	11(36.6)	14(46.7)	3(10.0)	2(6.7)
Second messages are usually in line with the government's aspirations and policies.	9(30.0)	13(43.4)	17(23.3)	1(3.3)
Second messages in ads are effective in educating the public.	6(20.0)	17(56.7)	7(23.3)	
Serious thoughts are being given to the types of second messages that would appear in an ads.	6(20.0)	11(36.7)	12(40.0)	1(3.3)
Besides conveying commercial messages to the target audience ads do carry second messages in response to the government's call.	5(16.6)	14(46.7)	9(30.0)	2(6.7)
Advertising practitioners feel that it is their social responsibility to incorporate second messages in ads	1(3.3)	9(30.0)	18(60.0)	2(6.7)

TABLE 3.  
Respondents'  
Opinion  
Concerning  
Second  
Messages

Thus, the above findings had proven that most of the time the incorporation of second messages had not been seriously considered by advertising practitioners as they felt that it was an additional burden to them and it was not their social responsibility to do so.

### Discussion

The study revealed that advertising practitioners' main considerations when planning for ads are getting the right concept, creating ads of high quality and keeping within the client's budget. Being profit-oriented organizations, advertising agencies are first and foremost answerable to their clients. Providing the best services to the clients and protecting the clients' interest would be their up-most priority. Thus, it would be impossible to consider any other elements first other than elements that could ensure the production of high quality ads. Besides that the advertising practitioners are also concerned on the accuracy of ads claims as well as the sensibility of ads. Being a multiracial society everyone has their own roles to play in ensuring the country's stability and the maintenance of racial harmony. It is very heart warming to note that the advertising practitioners do take pain in avoiding having sexist and racist impressions.

The self-regulation mechanism has managed to keep advertising practitioners from going overboard in their attempt to attract consumers' attentions. Besides that, the local audience inability to accept ads, which adopt drastic concepts, has helped in keeping the local ads within reasonable perspective. If any advertising practitioners dare to be different by going against the advertising ethics, cultural, social and religious norms the ad is bound to fail. Thus, most advertising practitioners opt to play safe in order to avoid being blacklisted by their clients. This was supported by one respondent's comment that "the local advertising industry was a burgeoning industry with a lot of talent only to be stifled by the Made-in-Malaysia production ruling which compromises the ad quality.

In another comment the respondent felt that "We lack local identity or idea. We are prone to adapt foreign ideas to suit Malaysian market, but there is little originality. Government's restrictions, a very plural society and clients'

mass marketing approach are all factors constraining the development of provocative and innovative ads." Lacking local identity could be due to the over exposure of our advertising practitioners to foreign advertising developments. This is because most of the advertising reference books are from the United States of America, and Britain. In the findings, we can see that projecting the Malaysian culture and identity element was the least considered, with only a negligible 3.3% of the respondents giving it a thought.

After having achieved independence for forty over years the government should not be too rigid in imposing the advertising regulation. It should be more relax so that creativity skills could be developed. The government should not worry about the possible social ills that could develop in the society due to bad advertising, as the public is capable of vetting undesired ads. This had been proven by the distasteful ads that had to be removed from the air. Due to this, advertisers would not want to get on a wrong start with their potential customers as this could be detrimental to business. Moreover, the limited effect theory has explained that there are other more powerful factors that could have more profound effects on viewers than the media and people do not accept whatever they see or hear from the media blindly because they are capable in weighing it and consulting others' opinion. Having ads in different languages and using different sets of talents are here to stay and it will be around for quite some time as its effectiveness in getting through to its targeted audience has not been challenged by any other means of ad production. However, if we have to watch ads that would disrupt our TV viewing frequently the existence of ads using different sets of talents and produced in different languages could be a blessing in disguise as it helps to overcome boredom and monotony. This kind of advertising characteristic is very uncommon and it prevails only in countries where its people are as diversified as ours.

Even though the government has encouraged the inculcating of second messages in ads, the government should not rely on the advertising practitioners to give much thoughts on this as the study has revealed that they do not normally do so in product ads. This finding is backed by the finding from the survey conducted by FOMCA where less than 20.0% of the local ads aired on television and radio incorporate second



messages as required by the advertising code. We cannot blame the advertising practitioners for being unable to incorporate such messages as an ad takes only seconds to be aired but yet at exorbitantly high rates. For example, a 30 seconds filmlet aired over TV2 during prime time would easily cost RM8,900 per ad and over TV3 it would cost RM12,300. On the print media a full page, full color ad in the New Straits Times would cost RM27,900 per insertion and the same ad appearing in Utusan Malaysia would cost RM26,500 (Media Guide, 1998). With such rates the advertising practitioners are left with no other options but to be single-minded in their ad production.

The scenario could be different if the ad was a campaign of a specific nature and in order to portray the organization as a responsible corporate citizen the incorporation of second messages would be given a more serious thought. In order to inculcate positive social values in the public, the government through the Ministry of Information should get more sponsors to sponsor filmlets which carry the relevant messages to be disseminated to the public. This, even though not very much, had already been done in campaigns such as Cancer Prevention, AIDS Prevention and Road Safety.

### Conclusion

Understanding why certain factors are being taken while others are not, is a complex process that would involve the need to look at the marketing plan and the product information. At times we wonder how the ad creators could come up with genius ad campaign that is simple but yet gives such an impact.

The study has shown the list of factors that an advertising practitioner would take into consideration. On a more serious note, it has been brought to our attention that Malaysia is not ready yet to have ads in one common language and non-verbal communication can never be as effective as verbal communication. Investing in the production of ads in different languages with different sets of talents helps in reaching the different target audience.

The study has implication on the government. Majority of the advertising practitioners do not give serious considerations to the incorporation of second messages in ads

and in order to disseminate positive social values the government itself will have to play a more active role by getting sponsors to sponsor relevant campaigns.

Even in its efforts to ensure social and cultural sensitivities of the people are not being manipulated by advertising practitioners, the government should have visionary business sense by having a more relax advertising regulations. However, even in trying to give some leeway to the advertising practitioners, the Made-in Malaysia ruling should be maintain as it helps to curb Western genesis. On the part of the advertising practitioners they must come to term with what is required as the country's situation is such and should realize that the content of advertising has relevance to the shaping of general societal values and norms.

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